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From the Editor

Mission and Identity

Who Are We and What Do We Do?

Yes, we have written about identity and mission before. In a sense, since our first words in 1992, we have written about nothing else. Although the words "identity" and "mission" have appeared on our covers about a half dozen times, our constant task has been to articulate what in our teaching, research and self presentation is consistent with the purposes for which the Society of Jesus was founded.

In fact, Saint Ignatius never started out to found a network of colleges and universities. He set out to respond to the practical needs of a Renaissance church in a time of crisis. He brought to this task a unique gift: a method of prayer and life that enables all those open to the experience to find God in all things. As it happened, this fusion of the search for intellectual truth and spiritual insight became a force that helped transform the Christian world and open the minds of the Christian West to the wisdom of other cultures and religions.

But the questions raised by this project are never answered once and for all. The 19th century Jesuits who, after the Society's restoration, remained unwelcome in France, Germany, and Italy, joined the flood of immigrants to America. They learned, sometimes reluctantly, to adapt the traditional *Ratio Studiorum* to the frontier. Split by internal conflicts, they asked: Must they modify, even drop, their Greek and Latin requirement and replace them with "commercial" courses to stem falling enrollments? Must they conform to the norms of secular accrediting agencies or stick to the *Ratio* which had "worked" for 400 years? In the 21st century Jesuit and other Catholic institutions have had to ask whether to sponsor gay and lesbian clubs or stage *The Vagina Monologues*.

Both sides in these disputes answer in terms of *who we are*. Over the last few years, our issues on marketing the Jesuit name, the role of women, the crisis in reading, faculty governance, the sexual scandal, the disconnect between generations, and physicality have been attempts to deal with the same underlying question: how do we remain flexible in order to meet the needs of a dynamic, rapidly changing culture and remain true to who we are supposed to be?

Rhetorically, this issue follows the structure of Saint Thomas Aquinas' teaching method. *He states the question*: Does the definition of our mission matter in the day-to-day operation of our colleges and universities? *He states the case of the "adversaries"*: *Some say that*: the cause is dead. We have squandered our legacy. *I answer that*, he responds, deals with their objections, and reaffirms the thesis. Here however we answer with a chorus of diverse voices from a

modern culture. We are still struggling to apply basic principles in a very fluid environment and make them work.

My own experience — working at five Jesuit universities, plus visits to three campuses a year — is that in most places the academic quality is higher than ever; the quality of the religious life depends on both the vitality of campus ministry and the background of the students; and that the commitment to a specifically Jesuit mission depends on a number of factors: administration leadership, the number and depth of special programs to introduce faculty and students to Ignatian spirituality; and the willingness of faculty who were not initially drawn by the school's Jesuit character to looking at their professional work in a new way.

Corrections and Kudos.

A few letters have come in during the year that have not made it into print. Responding to our report on core requirements in *Conversations* # 32, Diane Jonte-Pace, professor of religious studies at Santa Clara, corrected our report on philosophy and theology requirements. There are three religious studies requirements. There is no philosophy requirement, but one ethics requirement, although it could be fulfilled in other departments.

Xavier University's office on mission and identity has launched a new website (www.jesuitresources.org) with resources for networking through the Jesuit system. Xavier plans to develop an institute for Jesuit education to help faculty incorporate Jesuit values into their courses.

Chris Pramuk at Xavier described Don Doll, S.J.'s, picture of the African family as "breathtaking." All the more reason for our Don Doll current cover photo of the delegates to the recent 35th General Congregation, with the outgoing and incoming generals — Peter-Hans Kolvenbach and Adolfo Nicolas — on the roof of the Jesuit curia, with the splendor of the Vatican and Rome looming in the background. Many of these men share the prime responsibility of defining and staffing the Jesuit mission in our colleges and universities.

But, as our essays make clear, lay faculty members of every religion have caught the Ignatian spirit and are coming forward to fill that role. And our other illustrations attempt to present a mix of lay faculty, Jesuits old and new, and the thousands of young people our efforts touch. ■

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